(d) The major factor necessitating a review of roaming tariff by TRAI was the lack of effective competition in the roaming segment of the market that resulted in higher charges as compared to the cost of providing roaming services.

PoWs languishing in Pakistani jails

*157. SHRI HARISH RAWAT:
SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have received any formal proposal from Pakistan as a follow up of recent offer by the President of that country regarding the search of Indian PoWs languishing in Pakistani jails;

(b) if not, whether Government have followed it up with Government of Pakistan;

(c) if so, whether Government have formulated the modalities;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor and by when the modalities are likely to be finalised?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) No, Sir.

(b) to (e) During his visit to Parkistan in January, 2007, the External Affairs Minister reiterated India's request for a visit by the families of the missing defence personnel to jails in Pakistan. President Musharraf agreed to accept a delegation of families of PoWs. Government have proposed the visit of a delegation to Pakistan in April, 2007.

Indian passports in circulation

*158. SHRI SHANTARAM LAXMAN NAIK: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of Indian passports in circulation in the country;

(b) the number of passport offices in the country and their grade;

(c) whether Government propose to issue electronic passports;

(d) whether such passports are already issued; and

(e) if not, by when such passports are proposed to be issued?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) The number of Indian passports issued during the last ten years is 2.9 crores. However, the number of valid passports in circulation in the country is around 2.5 crores.

(b) Currently, there are 31 Passport Officers. These are not graded.

(c) Yes, Sir. The Government have decided to introduce e-passport, also known as bio-metric passports, initially for dipolmats and officials as a pilot project.

(d) No, Sir.

(e) The pilot project for issuance of e-passports in the diplomatic and official categories will be undertaken by the end of 2007. Based on the experience gained from this pilot project, it is proposed to start issuance of e-passports in the ordinary category by the end of 2008.

Court of Enquiry for Bhatdih Colliery

*159. SHRI TAPAN KUMAR SEN:
SHRI PRASANTA CHATTERJEE:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the statutory Court of Enquiry for Bhatdih Colliery (Nagda Section of BCCL) accident on 6th September, 2006 has been constituted;

(b) whether non-judicial personnel are included in the Court of Enquiry;

(c) whether normally sitting or retired Judges of High Courts/Supreme Court are appointed by Government for the chairmanship of such Statutory Committees;